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Moral Dilemmas, Theoretical Confusion: Value Pluralism and Its Supposed Implications for Public Administration

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Editor's Note

The Disputatio for this issue involves the value pluralism and its relevance for public administration. The three participants are knowledgeable scholars and the topic an important one. Don't miss a chance to become better informed on this important philosophical concept and the contention surrounding its applicability and relevance for public administration.

Abstract

In philosophical ethics, value pluralism is the idea, often associated with Isaiah Berlin, that there are many objective, conflicting, even incommensurable values and that this necessitates often tragic moral choices. Several administrative theorists (notably Wagenaar and Spicer) have argued that value pluralism has far-reaching implications for public administration. The cogency of their arguments is, however, questionable. This article critically examines the uses of value pluralism in administrative theory and concludes that its claimed implications are neither valid, nor exhaustive, nor congruent. Hence, the implications of value pluralism for public administration (if any) remain open to debate.

Keywords

value pluralism, public administration, meta-ethics, liberalism, politics

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A Meta-Ethical Notion in Administrative Theory

Value pluralism (VP) is a notion in philosophical ethics. VP states, roughly speaking, that there are multiple intrinsic values, some of which conflict in principle and often also in concrete situations (a familiar example is liberty vs. equality), and that no easy choice between them is possible. VP describes the structure of our "moral universe"; it is a position in meta-ethics, more specifically in axiology (Chang, 2001, p. 16139; Mason, 2011). Importantly, VP does not imply the sociological claim of heterogeneity in moral outlooks in the (modern) world, but deals with the structure of morality per se (Mason, 2011).

Such a highly abstract idea might seem to have little pertinence for the practically oriented field of public administration. In recent years, however, several public administration scholars have claimed that VP does have a profound significance for answering fundamental questions in the field. The two most explicit and philosophically best informed of these are arguably Hendrik Wagenaar and Michael W. Spicer. Briefly put, they have appealed to VP to argue for a practice-based approach to administrative ethics and an interpretive approach to policy analysis (Wagenaar, 1999, 2002, 2011) and to criticize New Public Management and Reinventing Government, to adapt public administration to postmodern conditions, and to defend the political involvement of public administrators (Spicer, 2001, 2004, 2005b, 2010).

So far, other administrative theorists have not bothered to probe these claims about VP and its supposed implications.[1] Examining them seems, however, highly relevant for our field, if only because it is far from evident how a meta-ethical assumption about the existence of a plurality of conflicting values leads to specific recommendations for administrative thought and practice. Hence, it is first of all a question of theoretical significance whether VP does indeed have implications for public administration and whether they are the ones claimed. But probing the claims is relevant for administrative practice, too, because VP is presented as an established moral truth with far-reaching implications for practitioners (public servants, policy analysts, and others). It is prudent, therefore, to assess whether these implications do indeed follow.

Our primary goal is not so much polemical or practical as theoretical: We want to better understand the implications of VP for the study and practice of public administration and as a means to that end we critically examine the claims made by Wagenaar and Spicer. To lay a proper groundwork for our argument, we first offer an exploration of the concept of VP as it has been developed in philosophical ethics in the next section. Then follows an explication of the way VP is used in public administration theory, particularly by

Wagenaar and Spicer (the "VP in Administrative Theory" section). In the "Evaluation" section, a critical assessment of their arguments is given, starting with the most general problematic aspects and descending to more specific issues. In the concluding section, we argue for a more cautious view of the implications VP (if assumed) may and may not have for the study and practice of public administration.

VP: Five Claims

In philosophical ethics, the main features of VP are fairly clear, although many debates continue to surround it (cf. Kekes, 1993). Our intention in this section is not to give anything close to an exhaustive treatment, but only to develop an account of VP and related issues that is sufficiently elaborate for understanding its applications in administrative theory. In advance, we must note that this account draws heavily on the work of Isaiah Berlin, who is commonly regarded the most important advocate of VP in Anglo–American philosophy (e.g., Cherniss & Hardy, 2010; Crowder, 2002; Gray, 1996; Hausheer, 1980, 1998; Williams, 1978; Williams, 1981, p. 71). Through his writings in political theory and the history of ideas, Berlin offers an inspiration to most later theorists of VP, including those in the study of public administration (e.g., Spicer, 2005a, 2008).

As is the case with most philosophical ideas, the literature contains thicker and thinner conceptualizations of VP. The most comprehensive meaning of VP, which is also the one closest to Berlin's understanding and which is in large part that of Wagenaar and Spicer as well, can be understood as a construct of five claims, stating (a) that there is a plurality of different values, (b) that are objective, (c) inevitably conflicting, (d) even incommensurable, and (e) that this demands trade-offs or radical choice. Let us explicate each of these claims more fully.

a. As said before, VP is a descriptive notion in the field of meta-ethics. Its first and simplest idea is that there exists a plurality of genuine moral values. They are not, or not only, of instrumental value, that is, they are not valuable merely because they serve some other, higher goals, but they are basic, intrinsic, and ultimate.[2] Moreover, they cannot be reduced to some overarching general value, at least not without losing their own distinct worth. The different values are all fundamentally good in themselves (Berlin, 1998a; Berlin, 1998b, especially pp. 237-242; Berlin, 2002a; cf. Gray, 1996, especially Chapter 2; Mason, 2011; Williams, 1978, 1981). To be sure, there may be values that have primarily instrumental worth, but there is also a class of intrinsic

values. Berlin postulates the existence of a great number of ultimate values, distributed across many different value systems, including our own (Berlin, 1980, 1998a, 1998c, 1998d; Berlin, 2002b, especially pp. 11-14; Cherniss & Hardy, 2010, §4; Gray, 1996, Chapter 2).

b. Second, the ultimate values postulated by Berlin (2002a) are purportedly all "objective." The ultimate values are objective because "their nature, the pursuit of them, is part of what it is to be a human being, and this is an objective given" (p. 12). They are the moral ends that people can pursue "and still be fully rational, fully men" (Berlin, 1998a, p. 9). Berlin emphasizes this objectivity of values to differentiate his theory from what he calls "relativism." Because values are objective, relativist views of morality are mistaken. This way of distinguishing VP from relativism by affirming the objective worth of values has become a common move in the VP literature (cf. Bellamy, 1999, p. 4; Bellamy, 2000, p. 189; Kekes, 1993, pp. 48-52; Kekes, 1997, p. 162).

c. The third and most important element of VP is the idea that many of these intrinsic, objective values inevitably conflict with one another. This claim goes beyond the commonsensical notion that value conflict can be *experienced* in practical situations (and often only at first sight). VP is not merely an experiential but a metaphysical claim. It states that many genuine, intrinsic values clash in principle, whether we experience it or not. Conflict between values is not contingent, but irremovable, permanent; conflict is inevitably associated with the very concept of values (Berlin, 1998a; Berlin, 1998b, pp. 237-242; Berlin, 2002a, pp. 212-217; Berlin, 2002b; Gray, 1996, pp. 54-55). Berlin (1998a) thus emphasizes the continuous and inevitable emergence of conflicts between objective values. Moreover, these conflicts are often irresolvable (p. 10). Value conflict can take place between values of different value systems (e.g., in religious conflicts) but also between values that are part of the same value system (e.g., in modern Western morality). As a consequence, value conflict occurs on multiple social levels, between various types of human collectives and individuals. It occurs even at the personal level, within a single individual's moral consciousness (Berlin, 1998a, p. 10). Hence, value conflict experienced by people is real and not merely the product of a flawed understanding of moral reality. Deeper analysis shall never reveal that the values involved in such moral conflicts could, in fact, be harmoniously combined (cf. Williams, 1981, especially pp. 73-76). The disharmony between values is, in John Gray's (1996) apt phrase, a matter of "moral scarcity" (p. 44).

d. Although the notion of value conflict is clearly the most central element of VP, most VP theorists go at least one step further and claim that each of these conflicting values also contains an idiosyncratic kind of goodness which precludes a valid measure or standard to compare their moral worth. This is called the incommensurability of values. There is much debate in the literature on whether VP necessarily implies incommensurability and whether incommensurability precludes rational choices between basic values (Berlin & Williams, 1994; Crowder, 1994; Hsieh, 2008; Mason, 2011, §4; Williams, 1981, pp. 76-70; Cherniss & Hardy, 2010, §4.4). Are rational choices between values still possible when their conflicts are, in the words of Crowder (1994), "clashes of absolutes"? (p. 295). And if VP goes "all the way down" in morality, so to speak, and there is no specifiable higher good to which various conflicting values contribute, does then reason lack all guidance in the choice between them (cf. Mason, 2011, §§4-5)? Indeed, how can values clash at all if they are of fundamentally different orders? The aim of the present discussion is not to resolve these thorny issues of incommensurability and the possibility for rational choice between values in the case of VP. The important point for us is that incommensurability is believed to make already difficult situations of value conflict even more problematic.
e. A final element that is often (though not necessarily) added to the previous four is that efforts to do good necessitate radical, often tragic choices and trade-offs between values. As Berlin (1998a) argues, "We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss" (p. 11). Moral decisions are needed, not constantly but surely often. To do good means realizing values, but if different values conflict and cannot all be realized simultaneously, a choice must be made—and will inevitably be made in our actions. For many adherents of VP, moral choice entails realizing the conflicting values only in part (if trade-offs are possible) or choosing exclusively one instead of another. In either case, moral choice goes with a painful sense of loss—the "agony of choice" (Nieuwenburg, 2004).

Value Monism Rejected

The opposite of VP is value monism (VM). VM is the idea that there exists an underlying harmony or unity, rather than conflict, of values. Berlin argued fervently against VM and the moral and political doctrines he associated with it (Berlin, 1998b, pp. 237-242; Berlin, 2002b, pp. 5-7). Variants of VM that are distinguished include Platonism, Kantianism (because it recognizes a

"canonical principle for ranking values"), and Utilitarianism (which posits that values are all "translatable" into a common value of utility and ultimately happiness; Kekes, 1993, pp. 63-75). Whatever exact form VM takes, its core tenet is the denial of inherent value conflict. Instead, adherents of VM maintain that all morally dilemmas can be resolved in principle (although probably never in practice, nor in our experience).

Value pluralists use different arguments for their claim that VP is a better account of the structure of values than VM. Their main argument is that VP, and not VM, is congruent with our common and "everyday" moral experience (Mason, 2011; Williams, 1981). Berlin (1998b), for example, uses this phenomenological argument: "The world that we encounter in ordinary experience is one in which we are faced with choices between ends equally ultimate, and claims equally absolute, the realisation of some of which must inevitably involve the sacrifice of others" (pp. 238-239). Value pluralists argue that in the course of our lives (and particularly when we are involved in public decision making), we encounter deep conflicts between different values that all appear to have intrinsic moral worth, but cannot all be realized simultaneously. And more or deeper reflection could never show a way in which the values can be combined. Many value pluralists add to this that the deep moral regret people often experience *after* making a—by all accounts—responsible choice between values should be taken as evidence for VP. We experience regret when one value is sacrificed for another. The failure to realize the sacrificed value feels as moral failure (Berlin, 1998a, pp. 10-11, 14-16; Berlin, 1998b, pp. 239-242; Berlin, 2002b, pp. 21-23; cf. Mason, 2011, §§2.2, 4.4; Williams, 1981). Hence, value pluralists argue, our ordinary moral experience of conflict and loss grant VP its plausibility over VM (Kekes, 1993, pp. 54-55).

Often, and certainly by Berlin, a further important reason is given to reject VM, a reason that still echoes in current debates on VP and VM, also in the field of public administration. This is the claim that VM justifies repressive politics and violence to achieve a political order in which the disharmony of values does not exist (or rather, from the VP perspective, is not acknowledged). Berlin regarded VM a basic principle of the totalitarian movements in the 20th century (Berlin, 1998a, pp. 12-14; Berlin, 1998b; Berlin, 2002b, pp. 5-23; Cherniss & Hardy, 2010, §§4.1, 4.3; Gray, 1996, pp. 21-22). The argument here is that VM feeds the utopian hope on a society in which all true values are harmoniously realized (what Berlin called, not without drama, "a final solution" to moral disagreement). If a morally perfect society would be possible, this would legitimate violent politics to create such a utopia (Berlin, 1998a, p. 13).

One could, of course, dispute the cogency of these two arguments against VM. One could wonder, for instance, whether ordinary moral experience is

reliable enough to decide the fundamental meta-ethical debate about the structure of values. And one could question the mechanism by which a belief in VM is said to result in violence and dictatorship. In the remainder of this article, we will however not attempt to settle these debates, but, assuming that VP is correct, inquire which implications it is claimed to have for public administration and whether these claims are warranted.

VP in Administrative Theory

As students of public administration have often noted, administrators have to deal with multiple values and therefore experience moral conflicts and dilemmas (e.g., Denhardt, 1988; O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2006). To describe this widely known experience, some administrative theorists have employed the concept or rather the term of VP. In such cases, the term is mostly used colloquially and without reference to its established meaning in moral philosophy (e.g., Langford, 2004, pp. 442-443; Van der Wal & Van Hout, 2009). Such uses of the term do not concern us here. Rather, we are interested in more theoretical claims about the implications of meta-ethical VP for administrative theory and practice. Two authors who have made such claims explicitly are Wagenaar and Spicer.

Wagenaar's Argument

As mentioned in the introduction, Hendrik Wagenaar has elaborated on the implications of VP in an article (Wagenaar, 1999) and two book chapters (Wagenaar, 2002, 2011). To start with the last of these, in his book *Meaning in Action* (2011), he discusses pluralism in general as a condition with which policy analysts have to reckon. He distinguishes between ontological, ethical, and political pluralism (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 289-294) and relates VP to the second of these: "Value pluralism is an ethical theory and consequently it moves in the rarefied realm of abstract philosophical argument" (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 294). It is "one of the key characteristics of values," Wagenaar (2011) holds, "that they ineluctably and irredeemably clash" (p. 292). Referring to the work of Kekes, he adds, "Moral or value pluralism postulates that a good life requires the realization of different values that in their practical consequences, inevitably, conflict or exclude each other" (p. 292). In the earlier book chapter, Wagenaar (2002) describes VP as follows: "Value pluralism describes the condition in which conceptions of desirable social states are plural *and* in which the realization of these conceptions mutually exclude each other" (p. 112).

So VP refers to value conflict, but not all value conflicts are equally problematic. Wagenaar (1999) discerns between simple, even trivial cases of

value conflict that are of little consequence and hardly distressing on the one hand and a special class of really problematic or "genuine" value conflicts on the other (p. 443). Cases of the latter, he claims, are characterized by the fact that "the values involved are both incompatible and incommensurable" (Wagenaar, 2010, pp. 292-293; cf. Wagenaar, 1999, p. 443). He then explains these two core concepts. Two values are *incompatible* when they cannot be realized together; they are inherently conflicting (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 292). Regarding the more difficult concept of *incommensurability*, Wagenaar (2011) says, "Incommensurability arises when no common denominator or overriding value exists to which we can reduce conflicting claims" (p. 292; cf. Wagenaar, 1999, pp. 443-444; Wagenaar, 2002, pp. 114-115). "A sure signal," in his view, "that some conflict is the result of the incommensurability of the values involved is the aforesaid experience of loss" (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 293).

So Wagenaar does not claim that *all* values are incompatible and incommensurable—only that certain combinations of values in specific contexts are. Such cases of "genuine" value conflict, in which conflicting values are both incompatible and incommensurable, are fundamentally irresolvable:

> In such cases it is difficult to find an easy way out. No compromise, appeal to higher-order values or fixation on desired outcomes, or conversely, no denial of the conflict by reducing it to mere emotions or passions, will make it go away. There simply is no common ground in these cases from which to arbitrate rationally between the conflicting values. Conflict in such situations seems unavoidable. (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 293)

Wagenaar (1999) claims the notion of VP is particularly important for the study of public administration, because "moral disagreement, not moral harmony, is the overriding quality of contemporary political and administrative life" (p. 442). VP is also "highly pertinent to policy making" because "[m]ost policy issues center on situations that involve irreconcilable goals." Administrators are confronted, he claims, with genuine value conflict on an almost daily basis: "Value conflict is inherent in program administration" (p. 444). Given this view, Wagenaar is sometimes surprisingly optimistic about the possibilities for coping with VP. He states, for instance, that "resolving value conflict is an intrinsic part of administrative life" (p. 444) and that "[g]ood program design facilitates good choices or at the very least prevents impossible situations" (p. 444). But as a value pluralist, he does maintain, of course, that value conflict can never be completely resolved. Value monist tendencies to think so are a dangerous chimera.

But if VP is the case (regardless how deep and irresolvable the value conflicts really are), then what are its implications for public administration? According to Wagenaar, they are twofold, pertaining first of all to

administrative ethics (the 1999 article and the 2002 chapter) and then also to policy analysis and policy making (the 2011 book). As regards the former, Wagenaar (1999) states explicitly that "value pluralism should be the starting point of administrative ethics" (p. 441). He distinguishes between a rule-based orientation and a practice-based orientation toward administrative ethics (Wagenaar, 2002, p. 111ff.). The former refers to attempts to guide discretionary administrative action by means of a coherent set of moral principles developed through rational deliberation. This is impossible, Wagenaar believes, because we will never be able to find such a set, not merely because of the limits of reason, but because of the recurring clash of values. His proposal, instead, is to adopt a practice-based orientation and look more to how administrators deal with moral dilemmas in everyday practice. They work intuitively, on the basis of their experience, in concrete and varying practical settings (Wagenaar, 1999, pp. 445-447; cf. Wagenaar, 2002, pp. 118-120). Hence, he argues for pragmatic strategies to deal with VP:

> As the examples from administrative life make clear, value conflict in everyday administrative situations is "dealt with" rather than resolved. "Dealing with" may involve many different things: evenhanded exposition of the situation, making general declarative statements, introspection, soul searching, painstaking inquiry to obtain the relevant facts, even subterfuge and calculating behavior. (Wagenaar, 1999, p. 447; cf. Wagenaar, 2002, pp. 125-126)

Such a practice-based approach should be stimulated not only to make administrative scientists better understand how public administration really works but also to improve the ways in which administrators themselves deal with value diversity. At any rate, they should stop trying to develop comprehensive and coherent ethical theories.

In his 2011 book, Wagenaar claims that VP also has profound implications for policy analysis and policy making (in his interpretative approach, the divide between the two becomes rather fluid). For policy analysts and policy makers VP is a condition to be reckoned with. In his view, VP is best internalized by what he calls interpretive policy analysis (IPA). When compared with more traditional empiricist policy analysis (EPA), which is premised on the positivistic epistemology of rational problem-solving, it turns out that IPA performs much better in terms of dealing with "complexity," with the factor of "emerging time," and with "deep value differences" (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 295-296). This goes specifically for what he calls *dialogical* IPA (in contrast to hermeneutic and discursive IPA) because dialogical IPA "brings different perspectives on the issue together" and has an "actionable, pragmatic, situated nature" (p. 296). Indeed, it works so well that Wagenaar (2011) suggests it can almost resolve the very difficulty of genuine value conflict:

> It is a widely shared observation that people who disagree on general principles are very well able to agree on practical recommendations in concrete cases . . . Pragmatic strategies of accommodating complexity, emerging time, and deep value differences are obviously not foolproof. The point is a different one. An actionable, dialogical approach sets the conditions for practical judgment; it makes room for the play of wisdom in public affairs. This, ultimately, is the decisive difference between representation and dialogue, between method and heuristic. (p. 297)

The superiority of (dialogical) IPA does not mean that the other approaches have no value. According to Wagenaar (2011), they are "complementary . . . in the sense that each has something unique to contribute, something that is not reducible to one of the other variants, to policy analysis" (p. 297). Nevertheless, it is clear that, for him, a greater recognition of the contributions of IPA is necessitated by the reality of VP.

Spicer's Argument

An even more extensive defense of VP in public administration than Wagenaar's is given by Michael W. Spicer. He argues that mainstream administrative science mostly ignores the pluralistic nature of values and the postmodern condition of the Western society, which shows an increasing fragmentation of society in terms of political and ethical outlooks (Spicer, 2005b, pp. 670-675; cf. Spicer, 2001). Instead, public administration enquiry in the mold of "conventional positivist social science" takes a "monist" perspective that sees public administration "as an apolitical instrument, designed and run with the assistance of science and experts for the efficient and effective accomplishment of some given set of ends" (Spicer, 2001, p. 519). Spicer argues that this view reduces the relevance of administrative science for practitioners, who (due to VP) have to deal with value conflict in their professional lives. The dominant monist approach is even dangerous, because it justifies a role for public administration as a mere tool for powerful political groups trying to impose their values on society (Spicer, 2001, pp. 519-521). If administrative science wants to reckon with VP, it should rely less on positivism with its instrumental rationalist focus, and orient itself more on the study of history and political philosophy, because these disciplines help understand the values that administrators have to deal with (Spicer, 2005b, pp. 684-686; cf. Spicer, 2008). Against the "monist" view of the role of administrators, Spicer defends what he calls the "constitutionalist" approach. In this view, administrators should have a significant degree of independence to take many values into consideration when forming and implementing policy. Such administrative independence would hinder political leaders who

want to impose their values on society. The ability of administrators to impose *their* own values should be restricted by a measure of administrative juridification (Spicer, 2001, pp. 521-524).

Spicer (2010) further adapted and elaborated these arguments about the administrative implications of VP in a monograph titled *In Defense of Politics in Public Administration: A Value Pluralist Perspective*. Although sometimes a bit unsystematic, the book's argument can be reconstructed as a set of four claims, stating that VP is a fact; that it implies normative (political) principles to promote inclusivity, personal liberty, and civil peace; that these principles are met when the state observes methods of peaceful conflict resolution and procedural justice; and finally that these methods should also be maintained and expanded in public administration. This is the "politics in public administration" from the title that he ultimately defends. Let us examine these steps in Spicer's argument more closely.

The starting point of Spicer's (2010) argument is the reality of VP, which he defines as "the idea that our moral values or conceptions of the good are many and varied and that we often find they come into conflict with one another in ways that do not permit any easy reconciliation or solution" (p. 18). Significantly, and confusingly, Spicer does not distinguish clearly between meta-ethical VP and moral diversity (cf. Spicer, 2010, Chapters 3, 5). In his argument, VP refers to a particular structuring of genuine values as such, but also to the fact of moral diversity, that is, the existence and intermingling of different moral outlooks. Borrowing his arguments explicitly from Berlin, he emphasizes the dangers of VM, arguing that "monist ways of acting and thinking" and the "monist approach to government" easily lead to incursions on freedom, oppression, and violence (pp. 18-19, 30-31, 50, 63-64). Quoting Foucault, he even associates VM with fascism (p. 64). Throughout the book, moreover, Spicer focuses on VP as it figures in intergroup relations. The idea that individuals (and groups sharing a common moral outlook) can also confront conflicts among their *own* basic values hardly plays a role in Spicer's argument. VP is considered mostly as a source of social conflict that raises political, rather than psychological or simply ethical difficulties. For Spicer, the central question is how social groups endorsing conflicting values can live together peacefully within the same state.

Having made clear what VP means, Spicer proceeds to argue that VP implies certain political principles. In his view, VP suggests standards for what he calls "moral conduct by government" and requires "room for the pursuit of many of the different and conflicting values or moral ends that we have come to believe as important to us" (Spicer, 2010, p. 51). From this very general ethical demand, Spicer derives three more concrete political

principles (he distinguishes them less explicitly and less sharply than we do). First of all, there should be the "public pursuit of a broad range of moral ends" (pp. 50-51). This means that the different public actors in society should pursue the various (conflicting) values held by different groups in society, as opposed to the pursuit by these actors of a "narrow" set of values that excludes too many other moral ends.[3] Second, there should be a significant private sphere in which citizens can pursue a broad range of values as well (pp. 50-51). Third, Spicer says a recognition of VP necessitates efforts to promote civil peace. Too many values would be undermined when society is permeated by violent social conflict (pp. 49-52). Reversely, recognizing the plurality of conflicting values in public action may prevent the outbreak of social conflict. Spicer suggests that these three demands on the state (we call them the imperatives of *inclusivity, personal liberty*, and *civil peace*) are implied by the reality of VP. He continuously refers to these prescriptions as "pluralist," but he provides little explanation why VP (either meta-ethical VP or moral diversity), considered by itself, has these normative implications. The argument seems to be that the conflicting values held by different members of society are all "true" and must therefore all be respected—and respect for them is best secured when the three described principles are adhered to.

Spicer subsequently argues that the political principles derived from VP are most likely met when the state is governed "politically." Spicer uses the term *politics* to refer to a specific mode of governing, drawing particularly on Bernard Crick's (1962) defense of politics and Stuart Hampshire's (2000) theory of procedural justice. Following Crick, he defines politics as "a manner of governance in which whoever happens to rule a society, be it a monarch, an elected assembly, or some other body, attempts to reconcile the different interests and values that exist within that society by using methods of conciliation and compromise rather than force" (Spicer, 2010, p. 37; Spicer, 2007). To explain how conflict can be resolved peacefully, he further integrates his concept of politics with Hampshire's theory of procedural justice. The universally shared idea of procedural justice, Spicer holds, is the principle of "hearing the other side" or "adversarial argument": In the conflict resolution procedure, the conflicting parties must be allowed to make their case, after which their arguments are weighed and a binding judgment can be made. In the course of history, mankind has developed different modes of peaceful conflict resolution based on this fundamental principle of hearing the other side. On the societal level, in modern constitutional states at least, these modes are democratic politics and a well-functioning legal system (Spicer, 2010, pp. 70-80). Spicer argues that these systems of procedural justice promote the principles of inclusivity, personal freedom, and civil peace

in society. Both politics and the legal system allow "for the public expression of competing conceptions of the good. In doing so, while they cannot always guarantee that decisions reached will take account of these different conceptions, they make this more likely" (Spicer, 2010, p. 75).

Up to this point, Spicer's argument has no obvious implications for public administration. Why should VP imply a defense of "politics in public administration?" The last part of Spicer's argument answers this question. Spicer argues that conventional parliamentary politics and the legal system together do not provide a sufficient degree of procedural justice within the state's binding decision making. There is need for procedural justice and "politics" within administrative decisions and actions as well. Spicer offers two reasons for this position. The first is that the range of values pursued or affected in public policy depends not only on political decisions, but also on administrative decisions. Administrators (or at least some of them, sometimes) have in their professional role the capacity to promote or violate the principle of inclusivity (Spicer, 2010, pp. 31-35, 64). Because of this, administrative deliberations must be designed to include consideration of the widest possible range of citizens' values, and must promote compromises between these values in administrative decision making. This design would have to be based on the principle of hearing the other side (Spicer, 2010, pp. 88-90). The second reason for (more) procedural justice within administrative deliberations is that it makes civil peace more secure. When citizens see that in decisions by public officials below the level of partisan politics the principle of hearing the other side is respected, they will more easily accept these decisions (Spicer, 2010, pp. 51, 89-90).

Spicer gives two relatively concrete prescriptions to expand procedural justice within administrative deliberations. First, he holds that administrators (at least in the United States) must consciously uphold the constitutional and political tradition, which requires procedural justice within administrative decision making. The principle of hearing the other side that is at work in this tradition, requires administrators to consider the views of various societal groups to create support for their actions (Spicer, 2010, pp. 84-89). Second, Spicer argues for ways to further the practice of hearing the other side within public organizations. This can be done by recruiting a workforce that is "diverse" in terms of social background and perspectives, and by promoting a culture of free discussion within the organization on its policies and guiding principles. To broaden the range of citizens' values and interests considered in administrative decisions, administrators should try their best to have citizens participate actively in administrative decisions that will affect them (Spicer, 2010, pp. 88-90).

In addition to his case for more procedural justice in public administration, Spicer believes VP may also provide a justification for political activism by

administrators. He argues that the conventional political process may produce decisions that go against the principles following from VP. Conventional politics (and the legal system) does not guarantee sufficiently "pluralist" policies. For example, a democratic majority might decide to restrict the religious freedom of a minority. Spicer (2010) claims it is "far from clear" that in such cases "public administrators should allow themselves simply to serve as passive instruments to promote the particularistic ends or values promoted by any one particular group of elected political actors" and execute decisions that "give insufficient weight to the values held to be important by other groups in society" (p. 87). Administrators have the responsibility, he seems to suggest, to hinder violations of the political principles derived from VP. However, this prescription is softened (indeed almost loses its force) by his qualification that, "[o]f course, administrators should follow the law as enacted by their political superiors and as interpreted by the courts" (Spicer, 2010, p. 87).

In sum, we see that the administrative theorists Wagenaar and Spicer have derived diverging but far-reaching implications from VP. The former claims that because of VP, both academics and practitioners in public administration should give up their attempts to develop coherent moral theories and policy theories and instead adopt a practice-based approach to administrative ethics and an interpretivist approach to policy analysis and policy making. The latter argues that because of VP, the study of public administration should adopt a constitutional approach and orient itself less toward positivist social science and more toward history and political philosophy. In practice, VP implies that governments (and particularly public administrators) should promote inclusivity, personal liberty, and civil peace and that principles of procedural justice should be maintained and expanded in administrative action.

Evaluation

After a description of the meaning of VP and its application by two prominent adherents in public administration theory, we now come to our evaluative part. As said before, we will here assume, for the sake of the argument, that VP is correct and that the meaning of its five elements is unambiguous. If so assumed, does it have the implications Wagenaar and Spicer claim it has? As we will see, there are many obstacles on the road to a positive answer. We will probe the positions of Wagenaar and Spicer by offering counterarguments to various steps in their argument, starting with the implications drawn from VP in moral and political philosophy in general and then proceed to administrative theory proper.

VP and Moral and Political Philosophy

The most immediate major problem for theorists employing VP is that arguably no normative implications can be derived from VP at all. The reason is that VP is a *descriptive* theory about how the moral universe is structured and thus entails a set of factual claims: Moral values are irreducibly plural and often conflicting, even incommensurable. But as Hume has famously taught, no evaluative conclusion ("ought") can be validly derived from a set of purely factual premises ("is"). Doing so entails the logical error known as the "naturalistic fallacy." This means that from VP alone, no normative implications can be derived. Just as the theory of gravity as such does not imply a prohibition to push somebody off the stairs, nor a duty for airlines to use reliable planes, likewise VP as such does not imply anything about what should be the case. The importance of this "is/ought" problem in value pluralist arguments in political and administrative theory must be stressed (Talisse, 2010). Before being able to derive any implications from VP, one has to stipulate (or better still, argue) that VP does indeed have normative implications. This is usually neglected, however, not only by moral philosophers, but also by administrative theorists like Wagenaar and Spicer.

But let us proceed and grant for a moment that normative implications can indeed be derived from VP (either because Hume's law need not be taken too strictly, or because VP is after all not purely descriptive, or for some other reason). Even if this is permitted, these normative implications need not necessarily be *political* ones. After all, VP is primarily a notion in meta-ethics, not in political philosophy.[4] There is no clear reason why VP, if true, should have any consequences for collective decision making, for the authoritative allocation of values, or for politics in any other accepted meaning of the term. In this connection, it tends to be forgotten that VP is not about moral diversity in society, but about the diversity and disunity of moral values as such. Many VP theorists, including Wagenaar and Spicer, easily slide from meta-ethical VP to societal moral diversity without noticing. Spicer in particular, but Wagenaar too, tends to suggest that the condition of moral diversity in modern multicultural Western societies is the same as VP. These are, however, two different things, and not obviously related. Indeed, there could very well be moral diversity in the world even if the VP thesis were false and VM true—people could mistakenly hold different sets of conflicting values. And vice versa, even in perfectly homogeneous societies in which all people accept the same set of values, VP can still be true. In other words, VP is a meta-ethical idea and its normative implications (if any) will be abstract and bear on philosophy rather than politics. No doubt, modern governments do have to deal with a considerable and perhaps growing amount of moral diversity in their societies, but that is not a consequence of VP.

But again, let us suppose that we can responsibly derive certain practical, political implications from VP. Even if this is granted, it must be acknowledged that these implications need not be liberal, or pragmatist, or even democratic ones. Both Wagenaar and Spicer tend to link VP to such rather specific ideological positions, but without much argument. To begin with Spicer, he argues that VP implies the obligation for the state to respect the personal liberty of its citizens and links VP to political pluralism, constitutionalism, and liberalism. He offers little argument, however, why VP has these implications. This is unfortunate, because there is a notable debate going on in current political philosophy whether VP has any political–ideological implication whatsoever, and in particular whether it is positively related to liberalism (cf. Cherniss & Hardy, 2010, §§ 4.4, 5.4; Neal, 2009). Let us briefly consider this debate.

The argument that VP entails liberalism originated with Berlin (e.g., Berlin, 1998b, 2002) and has recently been revived by Galston (2002) and Crowder (1998, 2002), in particular. They argue from the assumption of VP to the requirement for the state to allow its citizens the free pursuit of the values they espouse, that is, liberalism. Monism, in this view, justifies repressive politics and violence to achieve a political order without disharmony of values. The claimed liberal implications of VP have, however, also been criticized, in particular by Gray (1996), Kekes (1997), and Talisse (2010, 2011, 2012). The basic problem they point out is that liberalism itself prioritizes certain values (e.g., freedom of choice) over others (cf. Chang, 2001). This prioritization is, however, not mandated by VP, which recognizes many values beyond liberal ones and states that these values can conflict with each other. To cite Talisse (2010),

> Any attempt to explain why the state must respect the desire for free choice will invoke some value that the state must recognize as overriding, and any account of why the state must recognize this value rather than others will presuppose a rank-ordering of values, thereby violating value pluralism. (p. 310)

Talisse's point here is not that VP is *incompatible* with liberalism, but rather that VP does not *imply* liberalism.[5] It is neutral toward liberal and nonliberal values, which are both part of the plurality of incommensurable values. Any argument that VP has the purported liberal implications founders on this neutrality (Talisse, 2010, p. 320; cf. Gray, 1996, p. 154).

The same is true of other ideological positions. Turning to Wagenaar (2002), we see that he also claims that "political pluralism issues from value pluralism" and that "political pluralism is value pluralism as it expresses itself in the real world of politics and collective problem solving" (p. 294).

But whereas for Spicer this leads to a recognizably liberal position, Wagenaar seems more inclined to a pragmatist and critical position. He argues that "political pluralism has to make its case against powerful monist propensities," such as the appeals by "ruling elites" to consensus and reasonableness (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 294). Against political injustice and power abuse, Wagenaar proposes a conception of political pluralism and emancipatory progressivism. Again, however, it is far from clear how VP can warrant this highly political position. As Talisse and Aikin (2005a) have convincingly argued, pragmatists and progressivists cannot be consistent value pluralists any more than liberals can be.[6]

Reviewing the current debates, we conclude that the connection between VP and any political ideology is questionable. With reference to VP (or VM, for that matter), one can defend any substantive position (liberal or illiberal, progressive or conservative, even peaceful or violent) and VP itself provides no way, given value incompatibility and incommensurability, to argue the moral worth of one over the other. The move from VP to any ideological position, including those of Wagenaar and Spicer, seems unwarranted.

VP and Administrative Theory

So far, our evaluation of arguments about the supposed implications of VP has been limited to the realms of moral and political philosophy. But we can go further and proceed to the field of administrative theory proper. Here our main point would be that, even if we grant, again, that VP can have normative and indeed particular political or ideological implications (as discussed above), these implications are not necessarily the specific implications for administrative thought and practice Wagenaar and Spicer claim to follow. The reason is that their positions are neither exhaustive nor congruent with one another.

First of all, the implications of VP for public administration defended by Wagenaar and Spicer do not exhaust the possibilities: Rather than necessitating their particular views, VP combines with other positions as well. An important figure in this connection is Max Weber. When it comes to his endorsement of VP, he is often considered a theoretical predecessor of Berlin. As Gray writes, there is a notable overlap between Weber's and Berlin's thought: "[I]f there is an explicit anticipation of Berlinian value-pluralism to be found anywhere, it is in Weber's thought" (Gray, 1996, p. 58; cf. Cherniss & Hardy, 2010, §4.2). However, Weber's views cannot easily be regarded very liberal, because of his nationalism and support for plebiscitary ("Caesar"-like) leadership (Beetham, 1974, pp. 231-237; Weber, 1994, pp. 350-352). Nor is his position with regard to the responsibility of public administrators

very comparable with those of Wagenaar and Spicer. To this patron saint of political supremacy and administrative subordination, calls for "politics in public administration" and for intuitive, dialogical policy making by administrators would be anathema. The case of Weber alone suffices to prove that an endorsement of VP need not lead to the positions held by Wagenaar and Spicer at all: Their positions are not exhaustive.

Second, their positions are not congruent. That is to say, their arguments cannot be held simultaneously without inconsistency. We have seen that Wagenaar rejects proceduralism and rational deliberation about moral ends and is very critical about pleas for rational deliberation and also about setting up rules and procedures—but this is exactly what Spicer proposes with his notions of "hearing the other side" and "procedural justice." Interestingly, among the "monist propensities" Wagenaar (2011) condemns, he also mentions "trust in the adjudicating power of a set of democratic procedures to resolve societal conflict" (p. 294). This is of course an apt formulation of what Spicer, following Hampshire, proposes. For him, deliberation to come to a reasonable, collective decision is precisely what politics is about. Wagenaar, however (like Weber and many other VP theorists), thinks we should give up on rational deliberation about ends. Because there are many intrinsic but rivaling values, they suggest, rational deliberation leads to nowhere and agents should just cut the knot. Although cautious in his formulations, Wagenaar accepts that in everyday work the knots are indeed cut, within the context of a practice, on the basis of intuition and experience (see "Wagenaar's argument" subsection above). The upshot must be that, if the implications of VP are indeed those of Wagenaar, they cannot be those of Spicer too, and vice versa. Their positions are incongruent, because, ultimately, Wagenaar and Spicer disagree on the rationality of politics and administration.

To put this somewhat schematically, we could say that adherents of VP in the subfield of administrative theory seem to face a trilemma which prevents them from accepting the positions of Wagenaar, Spicer, and Weber at the same time. When they try to argue (with Wagenaar and Spicer) that VP implies an important moral role for administrators in public policy making and politics, they have to exclude Weber's emphasis on the primacy of politics over administration and the strictly subordinate role of the latter. When they want to claim (with Weber and Wagenaar) that VP necessitates an intuitive, non-rational mode of public decision making, they have to bracket Spicer's reliance on proceduralism and constitutionalism. And when, finally, they want to defend (with Spicer and Weber) the position that VP necessitates a course of neutrality between different societal interests, they have to silence Wagenaar's call for a critical and emancipatory politics.

So we must conclude that the positions defended by Wagenaar and Spicer are neither exhaustive for administrative theory, nor congruent to each other. In other words, starting from VP, one can end up in a whole range of positions. Among those who, confronted with the reality of moral dilemmas in public administration, advocate the pluralism of values, we see a pluralism of theoretical positions.

Conclusion: Little Guidance

In this article, we have examined the alleged implications of VP for administrative theory and practice. After discussing the idea of VP as such, we have first reconstructed and then evaluated the arguments of two administrative theorists (Wagenaar and Spicer) about the moral and political implications of VP in general and those for public administration in particular. Before drawing conclusions, we should note that although many moral and political (and some administrative) theorists accept VP as true, the notion is not uncontested. The controversy between value pluralists and value monists is far from settled (cf. Mason, 2011). Be this as it may, here the central question was whether VP, assumed to be true, implies the moral prescriptions for public administration ascribed to it by administrative theorists Wagenaar and Spicer. To this question, we have answered that the implications are neither logical (they do not follow), nor exhaustive (other implications are also possible), nor congruent (they do not match to each other). So we conclude that the idea of VP, taken by itself, does not necessarily lead to the prescriptions that Wagenaar and Spicer claim to derive from it. Their claims are indefensible, or rather only defensible after a long string of concessions which not many will be ready to make. In the arena of administrative theory, VP cannot properly be used in this way. VP, taken alone, does not suffice as the normative foundation in an argument for or against administrative moral decision, procedural justice, a political role for administration, and other contested topics.

Worse, the implications defended by Wagenaar and Spicer are only desirable if we also accept their particular set of values, that is, their moral and ideological choices. To assume that these are the most preferable values, as they effectively do, is to abandon VP. As noted, Spicer (2010) himself acknowledges at one point that there is no logical or necessary link between VP and the political pluralism he espouses (pp. 51-52).[5] This is a remarkable admission, because it means that his own moral prescriptions for public administration are not based on VP, after all. The chain of argumentation does not start with VP, but with the assumed priority of some objective values over others; and this specific prioritization can never be legitimized by VP. Wagenaar, too, makes certain (politically inspired) choices for some values

over others. This is most clear when he argues for a critical, emancipatory position in policy analysis and policy making. Thus, Spicer and Wagenaar both do what they accuse others of, namely, putting some substantive values permanently over others. They fight an enemy not simply of their own creation but one that is remarkably like themselves. They are not so much strawman fighting as shadow-fighting.

Although administrative theorists and practitioners have to think through the moral dilemmas they study and face, VP as such provides little guidance for dealing with them. As Nieuwenburg (2004) once concluded, "What, then, does Berlin's heroic pluralism have to tell us by way of practical advice for the conduct of life? There appears to be a quite straightforward answer to this question: Not much. . . . [P]luralism is a diagnosis rather than a guideline for action" (p. 692). VP offers an account of the way in which values relate to each other, which (if true) illuminates our moral situation. It can, in its less metaphysical meaning, also alert us to the pervasiveness and stickiness of value conflict in social and administrative life. But it does not, by itself, state that our moral situation is problematic, let alone suggest remedies for it. Hence, also after the contributions discussed here, the implications of VP for public administration (if any) are still open to debate.

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Notes

1. Book reviews of both Spicer (2010; e.g., Harmon, 2011; Reed, 2011; Vick, 2011) and Wagenaar (2011; e.g., Heayley, 2011; Ventriss, 2012) lack thorough examinations of the claimed implications of value pluralism (VP).
2. "Values," for Berlin, "are ideas about what is good to be and do—about what sort of life, what sort of character, what sort of actions, what state of being it is desirable to aspire to" (Cherniss & Hardy, 2010, §4 n.15).
3. We thank professor Spicer for clarifying this point (private e-mail exchange, October 10, 2011).
4. More than Spicer, Wagenaar (2011) shows an awareness of this gap: "Value pluralism is an ethical theory and consequently it moves in the rarefied realm of abstract philosophical argument. Political pluralism deals with the everyday world of politics" (p. 294).

5. Spicer (2010) acknowledges this point himself:

> [T]here is [not] necessarily any logical link between value pluralism and the sort of political pluralism that is implicit in our traditional ideas and practices of politics. One cannot, on the basis of value pluralism alone, logically rule out the use of force and violence as an acceptable and necessary means of resolving conflicts among moral ends . . . to do so would itself be to advocate a form of monism. (pp. 51-52)

Here, he denies that VP logically entails liberalism. A preference for liberalism is based not on VP, but on a subjective value commitment. Unfortunately, Spicer ignores this insight in the rest of his book. He consistently calls his liberal political positions "value pluralist."

6. But see also Eldridge (2005) and other responses in the same volume, as well as the reply in Talisse and Aikin (2005b).

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